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THE WIDENING LIGHT

CARRIE WILLIAMS CLIFFORD

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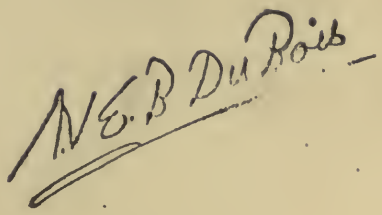
W.E.B Du Bois

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THE WIDENING LIGHT

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BY

CARRIE WILLIAMS CLIFFORD

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To

My Race

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THE WIDENING LIGHT

("*But above all comes the New Spirit.*" CRISIS.)

A sound of muttering, faint and far and low—
A sound of stirring restlessly about—
A harsher note and frequently a shout—
Of red defiance? not of peace I trow;
Oh, self deceived and blind who do not know
The meaning of this unaccustomed rout!
Do you not feel the frenzy? Can you doubt
The triumph of Race Hatred's overthrow?
The moving millions of the darker clan
Have wakened to Jehovah's ancient cry—
Not stunted, greedy, boastful, pale-faced man
Omnipotent is—"verily none save I!"
And piercing the dark clouds of dreadful night
Behold! they greet the light, the light, The Light!

A TOAST TO AFRICA

Christmas, 1920

From a goblet of rarest and richest red gold,
Encrusted with jewels of value untold,
All flowing and glowing with nectar of wine,
Distilled from the spirits of souls sweet and fine
As these sons and daughters whose deeds I rehearse,
With zeal all-consuming, though halting my verse—
I drink to my Race on this epochal morn,
Remembering the Christ-child who came lowly-
born,—
Was despised, crucified and rejected of men,
But *now* to whom honor and glory—Amen!

MOTHERS OF AMERICA

A sonnet celebrating the heroism and valor of the women of America, black and white, in the Great War for world democracy, 1917–1918

Ye, Queen, who bear the birth-pangs of a world,
To whom the nations in this hour of stress,
For succor look, and for the ruth to bless,
Ye, great, whose fondled darlings, combed and curled,
Are in the shell-torn, foreign trenches hurled,
To stay the hellish Hun, who else would press,
The cup of degradation and distress,
To lips of men with freedom's flag unfurled—
Ye valiant mother-band who gladly gave,
The first-fruits of your riven wombs to save,
The world from horrors darker than the grave,
Ye are the Brave, who in your country's need
Did sow the trenches with your Precious Seed—
The greatest gift of war, and valor's noblest deed.

TO PHYLLIS WHEATLEY

(First African Poetess)

No! Not like the lark, didst thou circle and sing,
High in the heavens on morn's merry wing,
But hid in the depths of the forest's dense shade,
There where the homes of the lowly were made,
Thou nested! Though fettered, thou frail child of night,
Thy melody trilled forth with naive delight;
And all through the throes of the night dark and long,
Earth's favored ones harkened thy ravishing song,
So plaintive and wild, touched with Africa's lilt;
Of wrong small complaint, sweet forgiveness of guilt—
Oh, a lyric of love and a paean of praise,
Didst thou at thy vespers, Dark Nightingale, raise;
So sweet was the hymn rippling out of the dark,
It rivalled the clear morning song of the lark.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

(In honor of the centenary of his birth—February 1817–1917)

A century of mighty thoughts has passed,
Of mighty deeds and Merlin-magic years,
Since first his infant wail assailed the ears
That knew not how prophetic was the blast!
Then swiftly sped the years into the vast
Store-house of time! The bitter vale-of-tears
Was vanquished, and the dark abyss-of-fears;
The thing, transformed, became a *Soul* at last!
Search noble history's most stirring page,
And tell what life excelled his in the race;
Trace deeds of daring men in every age
And say if one out-rivalled this dark face.
Great Douglass—*slave* and *fugitive* and *Man*,
With the immortal host, thou art in the van!

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE

(To William Stanley Braithwaite upon his visit to Washington, D. C., April, 1916)

An Appreciation

He came like John of old to all proclaiming
The Bread of Life; to our starved senses bringing
The breath of April in his offerings!
The resurrection of our better selves
Commanded he: the spirit-half of our
Dual existence, called he back to life;
Revived in us the ancient thirst for Truth,
The search for Beauty 'long the dusty ways
And sordid places of our journeyings.
Like John he came to our world-wilderness
The real from the false to separate;
The Light to set before our stumbling feet!
And some whose ears had long been deaf to Truth,
Whose hearts thro' greed had hardened into stones,
Were purified, revived and lifted up
By the persuasive magic of his song.

L'Envoi

O poet, with thy soul-wrought visionings,
O prophet, with thy wise philosophies,
O poet-prophet, prophet-poet, Come
Again to our low dwelling-places! Come

And bring the balm of healing on thy tongue!
Oh, wash us clean with fresh Aprilian showers,
Re-light the altar candles of our souls!

TO HOWARD UNIVERSITY

(Semi-Centennial Celebration, March, 1917)

The pall of battle scarce had passed away,
Hearts yet were hot with hate and hard with greed,
When some love-kindled spirit hid the seed,
Whose spreading branches shelter us today;
Beloved Mother, you for whom we pray,
Be fortified to meet our every need,
At your full breasts the hungry children feed,
Nor turn a single thirsting soul away!
What hath God wrought in fifty years! we've crossed
The Valley-of-Humiliation: then
Advancing up the Hill-of-Progress, tossed
A Challenge to the world of other men.
And reaching out for all that's manhood's due
Our thanks go winging up to God—and *You!*

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

(Upon reading the Introduction to "Lyrics of Lowly Life" by William Dean Howells)

The beetling night was fading toward the dawn,
When strange, weird sounds smote subtly on the ear
Of one far up the heights, who paused to hear
The song of him, who doggedly pressed on
From that low vale whence Hope seemed almost gone.
Persistently the sound rose loud and clear
Surcharged of times with radiating cheer—
Of times with sadness of a soul in pawn.

The hearthside lyrics trickled from his heart,
With simple melody and baffling art!
A traveller above called down the slope
And Dunbar answered, "*Comrade!* now I hope!"
One white, one black, but *one in spirit*, they
Symbolic are of God's Eternal Way!

And ye, who view life darkly thro' a veil
At length shall read its riddle face to face!
The hidden springs of beauty and the grace
Of fuller living, wait beyond this trail
Blood-stained and steep: there stands the Holy Grail
Whose healing waters shall the woes efface,
Of plodding pilgrims, who still seek the place
Where men of every race shall say, "All hail!"
To this broad shrine, we too shall bring our gift
Of joyous laughter, song and loyal love;
And rank on rank still surging up, we'll lift
Hosannahs to the God-of-Worlds, above!
His listening ear will catch our minor, sweet,
Making the concord of the spheres complete!

A DREAM OF DEMOCRACY

Depressed in spirit and harassed by thought
Of war, and all its festering, foul brood,—
Grim death, gaunt suffering and loathsome food—
I fell into a trance, being much o'er-wrought:
A vision marvelous my fancy caught!
Afar upon the Mount of Ages, stood
Old Father Time; and from his hands a flood—
(Increased by countless putrid streams that brought
Debris of all earth's cruelty and crime,
Intolerance, injustice, rape and wrong,
Until the putrefaction, stench and slime
Befouled the universe)—*swept swift along*,
And lost itself in a deep crystal sea,—
The cleansing Ocean of Democracy.

PERIL

As, when some filthy sore grows menacing,
Polluting all the currents of pure air,
Dispersing its vile atoms everywhere—
While with death-poisoned tentacles they cling,
To our hearts' treasuries, devouring,
And laying waste the temples of our care,—
The surgeon with blade kind but firm lays bare
And cuts away the flesh, foul, festering:—
So must the learned doctors of the State
Relentlessly cut the leprous sore
Of prejudice! else will they find too late,
Its rank corruption eating thro' the core
Of human brotherhood! Grim germs of Hate,
Razing our kingdom with titanic roar!

SOUL-GROWTH

(Upon the lack of opportunity afforded the Negro)

Atom of God! spark of the Infinite!
Illimitable thy majestic sway,
Where influences salutary play,
Thy powers to unfold to utmost height!
Potential gods, all, all who strive aright,
Defended from the pompous world's array
Of hostile forces, dragging to decay
Ideals of highest honor, truth and right:
Nurtured by rain and shine the queenly rose
In sheltered garden to perfection grows;
But on the desert, without loving care,
Is left to perish miserably there.
So with the Soul! if faith and culture fail,
"'Twill grow deformed and choked within the veil"!

NEGRO PLAYERS ON BROADWAY

(The Ridgley Torrence plays presented on Broadway by Mrs. Emilie G. Hapgood, April, 1917)

Behold! a Star is trembling in the East,
Whose pale light heralds a triumphant day,
The greatness of whose promise none can say,
Nor who the guest of honor at the feast,
When from the thrall of prejudice released,
Men see the Soul behind the Veil of Clay.
Then brother recognizing brother, may
Divine that least is great and great is least.

A beacon in the wilderness, O Star,
With ox-like eyes we note your lureful gleam.
And Star, so faintly shining from afar,
With God-like faith we watch the widening stream
Of light! Ho, Christ has come! the perfect day
In glory breaks never to pass away!

THE GOAL

(*"To make the world safe for democracy"*)

Exalted goal! Oh, coveted ideal,
Which but to contemplate, causes to steal
Within the heart, the sting of ecstasy!
Oh, fateful words! Oh, potent prophecy,
Which yet shall make entrenched wrong to reel
And stagger from the place of power—to feel
The odium of men, outraged, set free!
Tho' *now* the words are empty, void of life,
And soothly uttered to allay the strife
And discontent with which the world is rife,
These words shall yet become a fervent creed,
And vivified to meet The Peoples' need,
Shall fructify into heroic deed.

RACE-HATE

(On the East St. Louis riot, July 28, 1917)

What infamies have been condoned, O Hate,
What sin, what guilt, what horrors in thy name!
Such bestial revelries which else would shame
The darkest heathen in his virgin state!
Yet know that judgment on thine acts doth wait,
And Time will write with pen of leaping flame
The ghastly story—how thou didst defame
God's living temples—craven, crafty Hate!
For thou hast none deceived, not e'en thyself,
Thy bloody hands are raised for power and pelf!
Hath not the lesson of the Ages taught,
Thy seeming triumphs are too dearly bought?
Cold seas of blood convulse thy coward heart;
Already crushed, defeated, doomed thou art!

SILENT PROTEST PARADE

(On Fifth Avenue, New York, Saturday, July 28, 1917, protesting against the St. Louis riots)

Were you there? Did you see? Gods! wasn't it fine!
Did you notice how straight we kept the line,
As we marched down the famous avenue,
Silent, dogged and dusky of hue,
Keeping step to the sound of the muffled drum,
With its constantly recurring *tum—tum, tum—*
Tum—Tum—Tum—Tum—Tum;
Ten thousand of us, if there was one!
As goodly a sight as this ancient sun
Has ever looked upon!

Youth and maid
Father, mother—not one afraid
Or ashamed to let the whole world know
What he thought of the hellish East St. Louis "show,"
Orgy—riot—mob—what you will,
Where men and e'en women struggled to kill
Poor black workers, who'd fled in distress from the South
To find themselves murdered and mobbed in the North.

We marched as a protest—we carried our banner,
On which had been boldly inscribed every manner
Of sentiment—all, to be sure, within reason—
But no flag—not that we meant any treason—
Only who'd have the heart to carry Old Glory,

After hearing all of the horrible story,
Of East St. Louis? and never a word,
From the nation's head, as if he'd not heard
The groans of the dying ones here at home,
Though 'tis plain he can hear even farther than Rome.

Oh, yes, I was there in the Silent Parade,
And a man (he was white) I heard when he said,
"If they had music now, 'twould be great!"—
"We march not, sir, with hearts elate,
But sad; we grieve for our dark brothers
Murdered, and we hope that others
Will heed our protest against wrong,
Will help to make our protest strong."

Were you there? Ah, brothers, wasn't it fine!
The children—God bless 'em—headed the line;
Then came the mothers dressed in white,
And some—my word! 'twas a thrilling sight—
Carried their babies upon their breast,
Face tense and eager as forward they pressed,
With never a laugh and never a word,
But ever and always, the thing they heard
Was the *tum—tum—*, *tum*, *tum*,
Of the muffled drum—*tum*, *tum*, *tum!*

And last the black-coated men swung by,
Head up, chest firm, determined eye—
I was so happy, I wanted to cry.

As I watched the long lines striding by,
(Ten thousand souls if there was one)
And I knew that "to turn, the worm had begun,"
As we marched down Fifth Avenue unafraid
And calm, in our first Silent Protest Parade!

LITTLE MOTHER

(Upon the lynching of Mary Turner)

Oh, tremble, Little Mother,
For your dark-eyed, unborn babe,
Whom in your secret heart you've named
The well-loved name of "Gabe."

For Gabriel is the father's name,
And the son is sure to be
"Just like his father!" as she wants
The whole, wide world to see!

But tremble, Little Mother,
For your unborn baby's fate;
The father tarries long away—
Why does he stay so late?

For dark the night and weird the wind,
And chilled the heart with fear!
What are those hideous sounds and cries
Each instant drawing near?

Oh, tremble, dark-faced mother,
At the dreadful word that falls
From lips of pale-faced demons,
As the black man pleads and calls.

For they're dragging Gabe, at a stout rope's end,
And they say, "She is bound to tell!"

Something she knows not a thing about,
Or they'll "Give her the same as well!"

Oh, tremble, helpless mother!
They're beating down the door,
And you'll never feel the father's kiss,
Or the stir of the baby more.

Oh, the human beasts were ruthless,
And there upon the ground,
Two bodies—and an unborn babe—
The ghastly morning found.

DECEIVED

To war I gave my first-born, debonair
And over-flowing with the joy of life!
His heart was empty of all thought of strife—
He dreamed of radiant life devoid of care.

When next Columbia called I gave—I gave—
My little lad, my babe, my youngest-born,
Full of the light and promise of the morn,
And ready his beloved land to save.

These two I gave, my first-born and my last,
The Alpha and Omega of my love's dream,
So rudely shattered by war's lurid gleam—
My all into her seething cauldron cast!

Whose—whose the condemnation then, if I
Shame the false lips that lured them with a lie?

THE BLACK DRAFTEE FROM DIXIE

(Twelve Negro soldiers who had served overseas were lynched upon their return to their homes in the South)

Upon his dull ear fell the stern command;
And tho' scarce knowing why or whither, he
Went forth prepared to battle loyally,
And questioned not your faith, O Dixie-land!

And tho' the task assigned were small or grand,—
If toiling at mean tasks ingloriously,
Or in fierce combat fighting valiantly,—
With poise magnificent he took his stand!

What tho' the hero-warrior was black?
His heart was white and loyal to the core;
And when to his loved Dixie he came back,
Maimed, in the duty done on foreign shore,
Where from the hell of war he never flinched,
Because he cried, "*Democracy*," was lynched.

TERCENTENARY
OF THE LANDING OF SLAVES AT JAMESTOWN

1619-1919

Upon the slaver's deck, a motley band
Of blacks looked out upon the boundless main,
Knowing with anguished hearts that ne'er again
Their feet, with pride, would press their native land;
Theirs thenceforth to obey the rude command
Of masters, wielding cruel lash and chain,
Wringing three centuries of toil and pain
From helpless slaves!—Then waved war's magic wand,
And, at the sign, up rose twelve million men—
A brave, patriotic host, of great power,
To serve America in her crucial hour:
Titanic power, to bless or curse; for when
Pent wrong, injustice and oppression break,
Vesuvius-like, the heart of earth they shake!

TOMORROW

(*"Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand"*)

Tomorrow! magic word of promise rare,
What witchery inheres in thy sweet name,
Inspiring wild ambition, naught can tame,
To conquer failure—here or otherwhere;
The rosy rapture thou dost ever bear
Upon thy brow, is but the beacon-flame—
The luminous lodestone, luring on to fame
And high endeavor! Simple friend, beware
The fool who says, "Tomorrow—never comes";
For opportunities like bursting bombs
Shall blast the walls that limit us Today.
And *all*, who wish within *its* scope to stay.
Time has no end save in eternity
Of which *Tomorrow* is the prophecy.

FUTILITY

(To be a Negro in America!)

To feel emotion struggling and to need
O Christ, the power to speak the pregnant word,
That o'er these earthly thunders might be heard
And flame the souls of men to glorious deed—

To know the spirit's urge to rise and lead
The "hosts that sit in darkness"—to be stirred
To light a world, by wrong dimmed and blurred,
To cry aloud against the groveling greed
Of men, with faces ominous and pale,
Who stultify the souls of darker men,—
All this to see, to know, to feel and then—
And then, ignoble, shameful word, to *fail*,
Because convention spurns my human cry,
Because, oh, luckless fortune, *I am I!*

OUR WOMEN OF THE CANTEEN

Who shall tell the story of our women of the canteen?
Our women, golden, dusk and brown
Ministering in France to our brave boys,
Our brave, black boys
Fighting in Flanders!
Our stevedores in France unloading the ships,
Building the roads in Picardy,
That world-democracy might be a dream come true!
Was a soldier broken, dazed and exhausted by the hell of war?
Was his heart breaking with thoughts of home?
Did he yearn hungrily for mother, wife or sister?

Then would come these women
Dusk and gold and brown,
And with the tender, ministering hand of mother,
Or with the camaraderie of sister
Or the soul-sympathy of an understanding wife,
These dark women of the canteen
Would mirror to our boys
A bit of home, in France,
Heartening them for a return to the trenches,
And to the building of the roads,
And the unloading of the ships.
Oh, who shall sing the glory
Of our women of the canteen!

THE FREEDMAN

Agéd and broken and helpless,
Sapped with the toil of years,
Dumbly he questions the future,
Haunted and shaken with fears.

Slowly he searches the sad past;
Naught does he find there to shame
Faith of his heart—*he* was loyal,
But *whose* was the treason—the blame?

Blindly he faces Life's problems;
Where are his children? full five
Filial sons strove and labored;
He knows not if *one* be alive!

Meekly he ponders, he wonders,
Why, in God's name, he should be
Adrift without rudder or compass,
Sore-smitten with age, on Life's sea.

Vainly he questions the Power
Almighty, that sweeps us along,
The lonely ones sighing and crying,
The mighty rejoicing with song.

Agéd and broken and helpless,
Sapped with the toil of the years,
Dumbly he questions the future
Haunted and shaken with fears.

AN EASTER MESSAGE

Now quivering to life, all nature thrills
At the approach of that triumphant queen,
Pink-fingered Easter, trailing robes of green
Swishingly o'er the flower-embroidered hills,
Her hair perfumed of myriad daffodils:
Upon her trembling bosom now is seen
The frail sweet lilies with their snowy sheen
As sprightly she o'ersteps the springtime rills.
To black folk choked within the deadly grasp
Of racial hate, what message does she bring
Of resurrection and the hope of spring?
Assurance their death-stupor is a mask—
A sleep, with elements potential rife,
Ready to burst full-flowered into life!

SHRINES

Each heart bows low before some cherished shrine!—
Westminster Abbey with its sainted dead
Is hallowed ground where millions yet shall tread;
Love rears the Taj Mahal of rare design,
And wondrous beauty wrought in every line;
To Rome and Athens other hosts have led,
And where the great Napoleon makes his bed;
The faithful dream of ancient Palestine.
Some seek the home of poet, martyr, seer,
Of ruler, beggar, saint or cavalier,
According as these lives have left impress
Upon the soul of man, his life to bless.
Each heart bows low before some cherished shrine—
The bitter cross where John Brown hung is *mine*.

LIKE YOU

Like you, He came unknown and poor,
And closed to Him was every door.

His race, like yours, was held in scorn,
Like yours, was humble and forlorn.

Like you, He was of men despised!
(So deeply was the King disguised.)

The Roman rulers heeded not
The manger-cradle,—His rude cot.

But Wise Men watching in the East
Knew, the *greatest* is often *least.*

They followed His Star, brought priceless things,
Bowed low and worshipped the King of Kings!

THREE SONNETS

I

Appeal

Three centuries beneath your haughty heel,
Humble and ignorant, debased and poor,
Like mendicants before your Temple-door,
The potentates of earth have seen us kneel.
With guileless art we made our mute appeal,
And tho' you scorned and spurned us, tried the more
To love and serve you better than before.
Your children we have nursed, your evening meal
Set forth: your crops have reaped, your acres tilled,
Your burdens borne, your enemies have killed;
We've given of our brawn unstintingly,
And of our brain, when so you'd let it be.
Remembering all, how can you lynch and hate,
And with our quivering clay, your passion sate?

II

Demand

Torn from our heritage against our will,
And here detained by blood-hound and by lash,
From dawn to darkness driven by "po' white trash,"
The onerous tasks to do,—the soil to till,
Helping your dream of empire to fulfill—
Thro' blood-baptism and the clanging clash

Of war, and its swift clarifying flash—
The present finds us citizens (tho' *nil*
Our rights and powers in the common state)—
Who with the volume of Niagara's roar
And strength with which her giant waters pour,
Demand, with vigor which shall not abate
All the prerogatives which are our due
Without regard to race or creed or hue.

III

Warning

The Law that spins these toy-top worlds in space,
Divides the opaque darkness from the day,
Directs the shining of each solar ray,
Guides and controls the stellar chariot-race,
And holds the whirling universe in place—
Altho' no particle may stop or stay—
This Law immutable, you may not sway,
Or modify, or alter by your grace!
Unfailingly the tides of ocean flow,
The giant oaks and modest pansies grow,
Inexorably following the deed
Comes without haste and without pause, the meed.
A tiny tendril creviced in the rock,
In time will burst apart a granite block.

OLD IRONSIDES!

(Formerly the estate of Commodore Stewart, commander of vessel of the same name, and famous in the Civil War; now a school for the training of Colored Youth)

Old Ironsides! Historic spot so fair,
Whose generous-spreading acres beckon, where
In silent beauty sweeps the Delaware,
I love you!

High on your bluff commanding
I looked afar,
And saw in retrospect the place where war
Dark, grim and terrible
Forced Washington and his brave men
Barefoot across the icy flood,
Fighting for independence!
'Twas liberty for which they fought—
Relief from tyranny they sought—
These heroes whom I sing.

Around this hallowed spot there cling,
E'en yet soul-stirring memories,
Of those who walked your paths!
Have not these groves re-echoed to the cry
"Before we bend to tyrants, we will die!"
Brave souls who wrought ofttimes perchance in pain,
Yet not one agony endured in vain!

Time has destroyed "The Mansion" utterly,

And here the walk has crumbled to decay;
Upon that knoll, rank grows the shrubbery,
And if one glances yonder, there one sees
The avenue of old wild-cherry trees—
Dim vestiges of former glory!
Now gone are those who labored, hoped and loved;
Yet their indomitable spirit lives,
And to these dark-faced children gives
The moving inspiration!

Today I note your busy crowded halls,
Filled with those youths whom learning calls
To higher destinies!
The noisy workshop sounds again
To tune of hammer, saw and plane,
As earnest effort moulds to shape
The useful things that go to make
Man's lot more comfortable.

If to be striving—contented in the work,—
Which none would think to shirk,—
If to love nature and her beauties rare,
Here bountifully spread with careless care,
If to be drinking at the fount
Which makes men wise,
And all-encircling the cerulean skies—
If these things make the heaven for which man sighs,
Then here, Old Ironsides, is paradise!

THE FLIGHT

Away down south in Dixie-land
The place where they were born,
Where grows the cotton, silver-white
Tobacco, cane and corn—

I see your beauty, feel your charm;
I knew your ancient lure
For those dark earth-sprites, who for you
Did pain untold endure!

But now the cabin lonely stands
Beneath the spreading tree;
The old plantation echoes not
The weird slave-melody!

Gone! all are gone! how strange it seems!
I miss their gleaming eyes—
Their loud guffaws, whose hearty ring
Floats lightly to the skies.

What do they seek? Where have they fled?
Why do they roam afar?
They go to find the Promised Land,
With gates of Hope ajar.

Where schools stand ready to impart
The precious Rule of Three;

And high ambition may be served
To even the last degree.

Where aspiration soars aloft,
And self-respect may grow;
Where none would limit nor confine
The man who wants *to know*.

O Southland, that they loved so well,
The time will come when you
Wishing them back, will learn the truth
That faithful friends are few!

WEEDS

The little house in which I live looks out
Upon a garden, where I love to walk,
Or sit and dream and listen to the talk
Of others, moving restlessly about.
Sometimes the echo of a merry shout,—
Again the raucous tones of those who mock,
Of those who yield and e'en of those who knock,
Inflame my heart, or chill my soul with doubt.

These human plants within the garden growing
Are they the fruit, the sample of the sowing?
And the stink-weeds that flourish wildly there,
Are they as well the objects of His care?
Of malice, envy, hate and strife, God knows
Injustice is the rankest weed that grows.

THE GIFT

A priceless gift within your hand is laid,
A jewel fashioned by the Master's art;
No fleck or flaw bedims its perfect heart,
More precious than are emeralds—opals—jade.
This gift, for which gold never can be paid,
Is freely given by a Friend, whose part
It is to teach its magic—to impart
A knowledge of the *why* the gift was made.
Possession of this talismanic gift,
Like old Aladdin's wonder-lamp, will lift
Earth mortals high as heaven, rightly used;
But doom to Stygian darkness, if abused.
'Tis yours to will what picture shall appear:
The gift, a pure, unsullied, glad New Year!

RESPITE

At close of day, I couch me at my ease
In solitude, far from dull mammon's roar,
And let the rain of thought upon me pour
In showers, hard or soft as they may please:
Sometimes like gentle patter, thro' the trees,
Of joyous rains of spring, they touch the core
Of my parched self, reviving flowers of yore—
Pansies and sweet forget-me-nots, to tease
Old memories! sometimes a torrent breaks
Raging with fiendish fury 'til it shakes
My world of dreams wrecking my castles there,
Leaving my gardens desolate and bare,
When, from life's gilded pleasures shut away,
I seek my lonely couch at close of day.

Stay! vain, deluded man!
Know not you never can
Attain unto your high estate and rich,
While holding your dark brother in the ditch?

Hold! rash, misguided fool!
Why will you be the tool
Of passions, devilish, ignoble, base,
Wherein no God-like action one can trace?

Traducer of a race,
You, who are fair of face,
Stop! lest the children of a darker hue
In love, shall prove superior to you!

O, brother, pause! reflect!
Each cause has its effect,
This is the law: your acts or soon or late,
Will reap a bounteous harvest,—hate for hate.

PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

Father omnipotent,
God of the universe,
Thou Great Jehovah,
    We humbly beseech Thee!

Harken our loud lament,
See Thou our naked need,
Heed Thou our earnest prayer,
    Witness our tears!

Father, the enemy
Stealeth our lives away,
Feedeth us bitter bread,
    Abaseth our pride!

O God of Abraham,
Isaac and Jacob,
Of saints and of prophets,
    Our trust is in Thee!

Scourge him who scoffeth us—
Useth us despitefully—
Stealeth our substance—
    Thy vengeance, we pray!

O Thou who knowest all,
O Thou who seest all,
O Thou who rulest all,
    Flay and spare not!

VANITAS

He breathlessly pursued the dream of Fame
Spurred on by a desire insatiate,
To win a place secure and make a name
Renowned! Thus daily striving, soon and late
He wrought; but ever as he closer came
The goal receded: then with quickened gait,
Disdaining aught of censure or of blame,
He gained the height he sought with heart elate!
Oh, blessed height which he had seen afar,
Thro' gloom and sunshine, thro' distress and pain,
But ever luring, guiding as the star
Of hope, or as the rainbow after rain:
When lo! the sacred Temple-door was barred
Against his tarnished, craven soul, sin-scarred!

MOODS

Daybreak in the meadow
and the song of the lark in the sky;
All my hopes are winging and soaring
—*so high, so high!*

Nightfall in the forest
and the nightingale's sobbing song;
All my hopes are dead and the darkness
—*so long, so long!*

TO ——

Dear friend of mine whose magnet-heart
Hath joined mine own to thee,
Where'er with changing years thou art
Or near or far from me.

O friend of mine, I'd have thee know
How dear I hold thy worth!
Thy sweet companionship, I vow
O'ertops the gauds of earth.

Dear friend of mine, this faithful thought
May joy and solace be,—
Not separation, death, no! *Naught*
Can change my love for thee!

SON

We wandered through the meadow, green and cool,
My romping, joyous little son and I.
Bright was the rippling stream and we, withal,
So gay, we noted not the flying hours
'Til suddenly the sun had set, and gray,
Dim shadows o'er the earth began to creep.

No longer now he sang in childish glee,
Or sought the modest flower in cranny hid;
But close beside me walked in sober mood,
His hand close-clasped in mine; then coaxingly,
"'Tis dark, dear father; please, sir, take me home!"

My little son to manhood now has grown;
No longer fears he shadows dim and gray;
In fearlessness of youth, he braves the dark,
But I, who know the dangers of the dark
And all the ills which do in darkness lurk,

Am fearful, lest he stumble and so fall
Into the pit: but when Life's Day is done,
When burst all the bubbles he has chased,
And creeping come the shadows of the night,
Do Thou, dear Father, hold his trembling hand
And through the darkness lead him gently Home.

FRIENDSHIP

Not by the dusty stretch of days
Slow-gathering to lengthening years
    We measure friendship's chain,
But by the understanding touch,
The smile, the soul-kiss, yea, the tears
    That ease the load of pain.

ABANDONMENT

I want to sail out on the flood-tide of life,
To the uttermost reaches of self;
Forgetting the petty conventions of men,
And the scramble for power and pelf.

I want to sail out to the Island-of-Love,
And couch myself there on your breast,
To be soothed by your passionate viol-sweet voice,
And lulled by its music to rest.

I want to be warmed by the sun of your smile,
Refreshed by the rain of your tears,
Content in the clasp of your compassing arms,
As we drift down the tide of the years.

I want to float out on the ebb-tide of life,
As mutely the death watch you keep,
And feel the quick pulse of your quivering lips
As I fall in the last dreamless sleep.

TEARS

The World today is sad,
No light is in her eye,
How cold and pale she seems!
The dull, gray ashes on her lips
Choke back the rippling thrills of glee
That yesterday, a joyous river flowed.
Why does she weep incessantly—
With now and then a momentary lull
Succeeded by an outburst
More terrific?
I wonder if her heart like mine,
Pent and restrained,
Is sometimes full beyond control!
Then comes the torrent, merciful,
Relieving, cleansing, purging,
And washing free of care and dross,
The Soul left clean and purified.

QUEST

My goal out-distances the utmost star,
Yet is encompassed in my inmost Soul;
I *am* my goal—my quest, to know myself.
To chart and compass this unfathomed sea,
Myself must plumb the boundless universe.
My Soul contains all thought, all mystery,
All wisdom of the Great Infinite Mind:
This to discover, I must voyage far,
At last to find it in my pulsing heart.

LOSS

But yesterday
The wealth of all the world
Did not exceed in value the great gift
That heaven to me did send:
Today
The humblest beggar in the land
Is infinitely richer than am I,
For I have lost—a friend.

ENTREATY

O, thou, who art more fair than words can tell
Or a fond lover's nimble fancy paint,
May I not come to thee, where thou dost dwell
With hope that thou wilt heed my mournful plaint?
O, Love, thou canst not choose but tender be,
Knowing my every heart-beat is for thee!

TOGETHER

O, come, Love, let us take a walk,
Down the Way-of-Life together;
Storms may come, but what care we,
If be fair or foul the weather.

When the sky overhead is blue,
Balmy, scented winds will after
Us, adown the valley blow
Haunting echoes of our laughter.

When Life's storms upon us beat
Crushing us with fury, after
All is done, there'll ringing come
Mocking echoes of our laughter.

So we'll walk the Way-of-Life,
You and I, Love, both together,
Storm or sunshine, happy we
If be foul or fair the weather.

SUNDAY ON GRASMERE LAKE

It was that sweet time we call the twilight hour,
On peaceful Grasmere Lake we idly rowed:
Before us, matchless beauty lay revealed
In sky and hill and gently sloping wood.

The myriad thoughts that to our lips came thronging
We could not speak, but all entrancéd sat
While at our boat in tender rhythmic cadence
The laughing, dancing wavelets softly tapped.

No scene in all creation could be sweeter!
The tiny cloud that o'er the hill-top hung,
The quiet vale, the brown dove-cote * half hidden
Would fire to song even the most halting tongue.

Small wonder that the poet was inspired
To sing of this fair spot he loved so well!
Not Bobbie Burns nor yet the Bard of Avon
Could of his haunts a lovelier story tell.

Then suddenly in voice deep and subduéd
One began the "Ode" of Wordsworth's to repeat,
"On Immortality," thus ending fitly
A holy day with holy joy complete.

* *Wordsworth's home is called Dove Cottage.*

LIFE AND DEATH

Life

I saw the candle brightly burning in the room!
The fringéd curtains gracefully draped back,
The windows, crystal clear!
Upon the generous hearth
Quick Wit and bubbling Laughter
  Flashed and danced,
  Sparkled and pranced,
And music to the glowing scene lent cheer.
It was a gracious sight,
So full of life, of love, of light!

Death

Then suddenly I saw a cloud of gloom
Take form within the room:
A blue-grey mist obscured the window-panes
And silent fell the *rout!*
Then from the shadows came the Dreaded Shape,—
The candle flickered out!

GOD

I know a lot of folk who think
That God
Is just a great, big tub
Of Grub.
Descanting on His bounty
They will measure
His prodigal treasure
By so many
"Head o' hogs," "bushel o' grain" or "barr'l o' potatoes!"

But to me
God is the lily's dream,
The low, sweet note
In the thrush's throat—
The sun-beam's glory by a dew-drop caught!
He is the mighty tide
Gripping old ocean's side—
The mountain's thought!

SPRING

Spring, thou wilful, changeful maid,
Venturesome, yet half afraid
King Winter to defy,
Come, with all thy airs and graces,
Perfumes sweet and flower-laces;
When he thy rare beauty faces,
He, of love, will die.

POETRY

What is poetry?
A thought of beauty—truth,
An emotion rife with ruth—
With love!
All rhythmically expressed,
Carefully groomed—exquisitely dressed.

ECSTASY

Your eyes star-worlds of beauty are,
My long road blazing from afar,
Sweet Emily!

The essence of the rose's musk
Bathes your wine-lips as through the dusk
They summon me!

The downy pillows of your breast,
Sweet Eden where my soul would rest
Eternally!

COMPENSATION

In my infinity of loss
I seek to find the gain,—
The tender glance, the word of love,
The kiss divine—in vain!
No priceless gem of memory,
But ah! the pain, the pain!

EGYPTIAN SPHINX

Inscrutable and awe-inspiring Sphinx,
Inimitable and immortal, whose
Majestic head of massed and matted kinks
Constrains alike the savant and the muse
To marvel at thy muted mystery!
What age-long memories thy face betrays!
What moving visions thou hast seen—*dost see!*
Thou art the symbol that, to present days,
The ancient years indubitably links!
Wherever men their righteous voices raise
Such deeds of grandeur to extol and praise,
The Sons of Africa, who builded thee,
Through us shall swell the song of jubilee:
And matchless thou shalt stand, imperial Sphinx.

BEAUTIFUL HANDS

To a Skilful Surgeon

Not perfectly moulded, not smooth and cold
Suggesting the touch of senseless gold,
But warm and pulsing hands, tenderly
Thrilling the wealth of a heart to me.

Hands that are willing and busy and warm;
Hands that are eager to shelter from harm;
Hands that are capable—potent indeed,
Quickly outstretched to another's need.

Ready and restful hands, loving and strong,
But soothing and soft as a lullaby song;
Hands with the magic given suffering to ease;
Oh, who would not worship such dear hands as these!

LINCOLN

Upon the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial at Washington, May 30, 1922

Son of the people, softly, sweetly rest!
Thy universal heart felt all the woes
Of mankind! They only were thy foes
Who hated right—who loved the evil best:
How hard man's cruelty upon thee pressed,
Thy deeply-lined and tragic visage shows!
Thy great soul-agony, only God knows,
When this great Union's fate was put to test!
But trusting in Jehovah's power to guide,
Nor caring if the whole world should deride,
With granite will, thou stoodst the Right beside.
Thus from the lowly cabin thou didst climb
To hallow this memorial sublime,
And men shall love thee to the end of time.

OLD OCEAN AND THE SHORE

Lovers in Three Moods

I

Smiling, big and full of joy,
I saw Old Ocean rush upon the Shore:
With wide-spread arms
He caught her to his heart.
I heard him chuckle softly to himself;
I saw his fingers stroke her sea-weed hair;
He kissed and kissed and kissed again
Her lush, responsive lips!
And she who had been pale and cold
Grew warm and dimpled at his touch.

II

I saw Old Ocean sullen, moody, mad;
The Shore stretched out her shell-like hands in vain;
No bubbling laughter greeted her sad ear;
He offered no caress.
He glowered at her, grumbling through his teeth!
Oh, he was dark and sinister!
He would not look upon her, waiting, wan!
God! I could better bear his blows
Than this indifference!

III

I heard Old Ocean warring in his wrath!
He shook and slashed and swore with fury!
With heavy fists he beat upon the Shore;
He tore her hair;
He screamed and raged;
He bruised her tender, shining flesh;
He gripped her with the strength of many giants,—
Shrieking—lashing—kicking—
Until at length, his jealous fury spent,
He sank exhausted in her waiting arms!
" *'Tis well,*" *the Shore said softly,*
"*For he loveth much.*"

THE NEW YEAR

The New Year comes—fling wide, fling wide the door
Of Opportunity! the spirit free
To scale the utmost heights of hopes to be,
To rest on peaks ne'er reached by man before!
The boundless infinite let us explore,
To search out undiscovered mystery,
Undreamed of in our poor philosophy!
The bounty of the gods upon us pour!
Nay, in the New Year we shall be as gods:
No longer apish puppets or dull clods
Of clay; but poised, empowered to command,
Upon the Etna of New Worlds we'll stand—
This scant earth-raiment to the winds will cast—
Full richly robed as supermen at last!

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